DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 252 CG 020 944

TITLE Project Asset 1986-1987.
INSTITUTION Genesee Intermediate School District, Flint, Mich.
PUB DATE 28 Mar 88
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Dropout Prevention (1st, Winston-Salem, NC, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Programs; Dropouts; *High Risk Students; Secondary Education; Secondary School Students; Social Support Groups; *Student Employment

ABSTRACT

This document describes an innovative dropout prevention program, Academic Support for Students and Employment Training (Project ASSET). It explains how participants were selected from students considered to be dropout risks because of attendance, grade-level test results, or dropout history and extenuating circumstances. Three types of support provided to students by Project ASSET are discussed: (1) financial support provided in the form of job placement; (2) academic support provided through study sessions in mathematics and reading held after school, supplemented with computer-coordinated courses already functioning in the school; and (3) personal support provided through home visits and meetings with teachers, supervisors, and staff. Recommendations for program changes are discussed, including dropping the public assistance requirement, motivators for study sessions, and expansion to 9th and 10th graders and middle school students. The renovation of an old elementary school by Project ASSET participants over the summer is discussed in detail, with an explanation of how students who had previously had little or no experience in working with tools worked under craftsmen, putting up walls and insulating. Over 30 pictures illustrating the work are included. (ABL)

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ED296252

Project Asset

1986 - 1987

CG 020944

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Genesee Intermediate School District

2413 West Maple Avenue Flint, Michigan 48507-3493 (313) 768-4400

March 28, 1988

To: Participants in the First National Conference on Dropout Prevention
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
March 27 - 29, 1988

From: David E. Spathelf, Superintendent
Genesee Intermediate School District
Flint, Michigan

Re: Project ASSET

GISD is a regional service agency serving 90,000 in the greater Flint area. We are proud to share the Beecher Community School District's Project (Academic Support for Students and Employment Training) ASSET.

The State of Michigan has long been recognized for it's educational achievements. Yet historically the high wages associated with employment in the manufacturing industry combined with other factors has encouraged early separation from secondary education. Locally the dropout levels have exceeded the national rate for several years.

Project ASSET, a pilot dropout prevention program at Beecher has been successful in reversing this trend in an area where unemployment, welfare, single head of household and low academic achievement are key economic indicators.

It is hoped that other districts will benefit from this innovative and successful dropout prevention program.

Rachael E Moreno
Associate Superintendent

David E. Spathelf
Superintendent

Thomas B. Princinsky
Associate Superintendent

Lawrence P. Ford
President

Elmer A. Knopf
Vice President

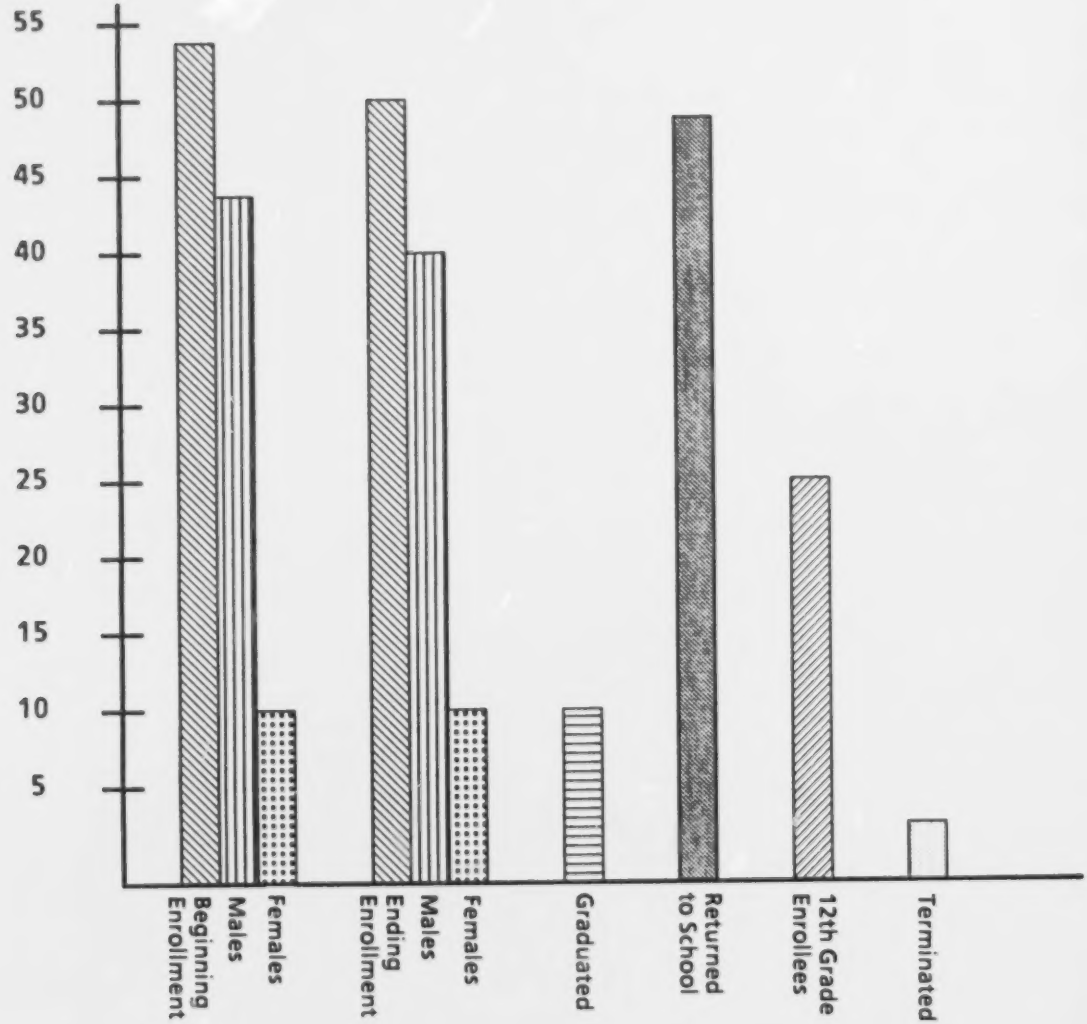
Loretta J. Manwaring
Secretary

Peggy J. Tortorice
Treasurer

William R. Walworth
Trustee

Project Asset

February 15, 1987 - September 30, 1987



Project ASSET-Background

Project (Academic Support for Students and Employment Training) ASSET is a pilot dropout prevention project at Beecher High School in Mt. Morris, Michigan. Beecher Community Schools is one of twenty-one local districts in the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD). The Beecher district has a total enrollment of 3,391 including 895 students at their high school.

Interested participants were selected from a list of students who were considered a dropout risk according to guidelines established by the State of Michigan. Guidelines were established around attendance, grade-level test results, dropout history and extenuating circumstances.

Project ASSET taps in to three major areas to assist students in continuing their education: financial support, educational support and personal support.

Financial Support-Job Placement

Financial support is tendered in the form of job placement, intended to aid the students in developing work skills.

Last year, seventeen employers from public sector businesses took on fifty student participants. In exchange for subsidized wages, employers furnished a positive, realistic, work experience, training students in marketable skills and work expectations.

Students worked thirty to forty hours a week and held a variety of positions. Many were placed in offices learning office procedures and communication skills. Some contended with the heat and sunshine, while keeping properties up to snuff. Others attained supervisory skills while acting as aides to various programs.

Employment attained through Project ASSET was a first for most students. Few had previously confronted the challenge of meeting employer expectations. Yet, as they were learning about work responsibilities and saving money for school clothes, employers were also benefitting.

Lemuel Walls, Flint Head Start Director, said, :We got projects done this summer that we didn't expect to get done, largely because of the (project) student working for us."

Cheryl Voyles, of Flint Children's Museum, said, "We hated to see her (the student) leave. I tried talking her into some volunteer work!....We'll miss her."

Students had prepared for placement by participating in ten hours of employability skills training taught by project coordinators. The goal of employability training was "aimed at realism." Training included accurate application completion, writing attention-getting resumes and interview skill practice.

In the spirit of congenial rivalry, students interviewed with an employer for an open position and competed with one another for placement in the desired position.

Cheryl Voyles noted, "Students interviewed well. They seemed prepared and dressed appropriately."

Academic Support

In return for job placement offered during the spring and summer, students agreed to attend study sessions; the main concentration of Project ASSET remains on educational support and academic improvement. Educational support given through study sessions, which met five hours a week ,covered tutoring and remedial education in math and reading. Study sessions, supplemented with computer-coordinated courses already functioning in the school district were held after school.

Project ASSET staff contacted participant's teachers to locate weak areas, "troubleshoot," and receive student assignments.

Teachers have noticed Project ASSET's effects and results. Robert Eid, a history teacher at the high school, said, "I've noticed a difference in class-the students seem more interested."

Sociology teacher, George Moss, said, "There should have been a program like this before."

Personal Support

Project ASSET, one of several pilot programs state-wide, is the only program that incorporates home visits into the personal support phase of the program. Home visits cover a broad scope of needs. Home visits are one of the most successful aspects of the dropout program. Parent meeting have given valuable insight into the needs of individual students. Other home visits enlightened parents to situations of which they were not aware.
Betty Burnett, mother of participant. Lotus Pennington, said she "appreciated the personal interest shown her daughter" and "it's nice to know somebody cares."

Initial home meetings usually introduced the parent to the program. Project staff acted as a liaison between parents and the school, employers or various social service agencies.

Project ASSET also offers personal support through an alliance of teachers, supervisors and staff who encourage and meet with students to find solutions to personal, social or academic problems. Strong emphasis is placed on home support and communication in parent-student relationships and parent-school relationships.

Project ASSET-Ahead

Although the program has gone well, despite starting late in the school year (February 1987), the staff is ready to make recommendations for improvement. Recommendations to the state regarding income requirements have already been accepted. Participants are no longer required to receive assistance from the Department of Social Services. Other recommendations, which are yet to be approved, include built-in motivators for study sessions, expansion to include ninth and tenth graders and to the middle schools. Allowing participants to remain in the program over an extended period of time is an additional recommendation.

After working with students all spring, program expansion seemed inevitable last summer. Room was made for twenty more students to participate in work-training program renovating Riley Adult and Career Education Center in the Beecher School District during the Summer of 1987.

The funding was officially expanded by the Michigan State Board of Education in July, 1987. Students expressed an early interest in participating in the program during the 1987-1988 school year. Interest has been generated and students want to work.

PROJECT ASSET ENHANCEMENT

The Riley Building Renovation Need

What to do when state-of-the-art becomes old hat? The Beecher Community School District with the help of the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD) solved the problem creatively last summer. Summer expansion and enhancement of the original dropout prevention concept resulted.

Klein Elementary School, once the 1950's epitome of the latest advances in school construction, had become out-dated in 1986. Asbestos, the ideal insulation of the 1950's, both a fire retardant and inexpensive, lined the school. The school yard was no longer enlivened by school children. It had matured to become the Riley Adult and Career Education Center, educating, training and providing job placement to students 18 and over.

Enter, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the 1980's. Under EPA guidelines, the asbestos used liberally in the construction of the Riley Building was determined to be a cancer-causing substance.

In the fall of 1986, shortly before classes began, the asbestos in the Riley Building was removed in accordance with an EPA directive. Girders were left bared, wire mesh hung unattractively from the ceiling. Halls were grim and poorly lighted. The sounds of teacher's voices rose, mixed, echoed and re-echoed among the girders and wire mesh.

Confided first impressions went something like this:

> "This building should be condemned!"
> "This really is a poor school district."
> "This couldn't be a school."

The Riley Solution

The Riley School would have remained a "shell" indefinitely without the active interest and involvement last summer of GISD,

Beecher and Project ASSET, a pilot dropout prevention program in the Beecher School District.

JTPA (Job Training Partnership Act) and GISD collaborated swiftly to organize an innovative program designed to each marketable work skills to disadvantaged students through Riley's renovation. Both the GISD's grants department and JTPA coordinator scrambled to get the program ready to go as soon as possible last summer. The Private Industry Council (PIC), a directing board of JTPA, gave the go-ahead to the work program. Thus, not only would Riley get "face lift renovation," but students would work under trained craftsmen learning to use hammers, drills, etc. to break down and re-build walls.

At the end of the 1986 school year, there was a clear need to expand Project ASSET. The dropout program presented itself as the ideal vehicle to meet the needs of more dropout risk students and solve Riley's problem.

Project ASSET oversaw the day to day operation of the program troubleshooting, job counseling students and handling payroll. In February 1987, twenty students wre selected and scheduled to work in two, five-hour shifts, in addition to students enrolled in the program earlier.

Student Involvement

Interested students were selected on a first-come, first-served basis. Beecher students between 16 and 18 needed to fall under dropout guidelines established by the State of Michigan.

Since most students had not worked previously, job counseling included work expectations, requirements and work relationships. Through the Riley Renovation work program and Project ASSET counseling, students also learned more about the work world.

Marlow Stewart, a student worker, said, "Now I know what my dad feels like (at the end of a day's work!)"

Michael Seltzer, another student worker, reflected more than his own feelings when he said, "The hardest part of this job is getting up at 6 a.m."

Concerning the skill level of the workers, James Gill, the worksite supervisor of the project, said, "Few (of the workers) could drive a nail without bending it. The came with little or no skills in putting up drywall and few could read the tape measure to the 1/8, 1/4 or 1/2 of an inch."

Generally, four students worked with one craftsman. Together the work crews had three months to make twelve classrooms, three offices, one food service area and day care, operational for the fall semester beginning in September, 1987.

The work was a little different than many summer renovation/construction jobs. Entire wall sections were removed form Riley. Large, gaping, hangar-like sections were gradually gridded with studs, padded with insulation and sealed with gypsum board.

Marlow Stewart said he thought he would be "just painting and sanding, not taking down walls!"

Gill and several students agreed, the hardest task this summer was framing and putting up walls. Yet many students indicated an interest to do similar jobs in the future.

"Some of them have approached me," said Gill, "and asked about learning more, and how they can get a job in this field."

Summer's End

Over four thousand man-hours later, the Riley Building has taken on a different look. The clean look of fresh paint covers the walls, lights reflect brightly against the new drop ceiling. Smaller, energy-efficient windows have replaced large, cracked and broken ones. At the end of summer, students had more than cold cash to show for their efforts. They can look with pride at the new "face" of the

Riley Building and put the experience learned last summer to work for themselves, either at home or at another job.

Student workers, William Anderson and Michael Seltzer, both agreed they would "definitely, most definitely" use the skills learned last summer on their own houses some day.

Anderson, indicated he "always wanted to do construction work," and plans to look into it as a career.

Adult and Career Education
Riley Building
1149 Klein Street
Mt. Morris, MI 48458

Funded By

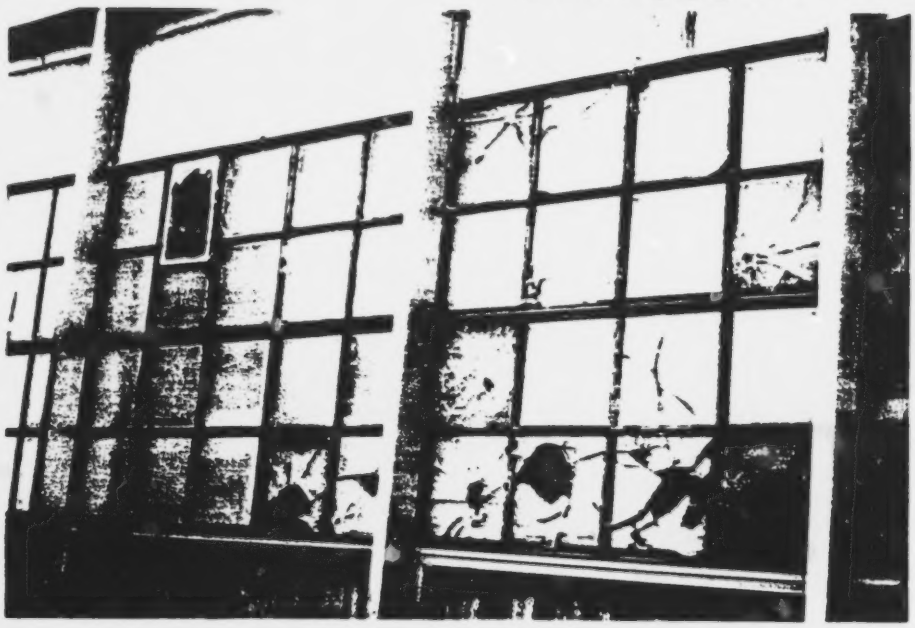
Operation Graduation Dropout Prevention
Vocational Technical Education Services
Michigan Department of Education

The Building in Need

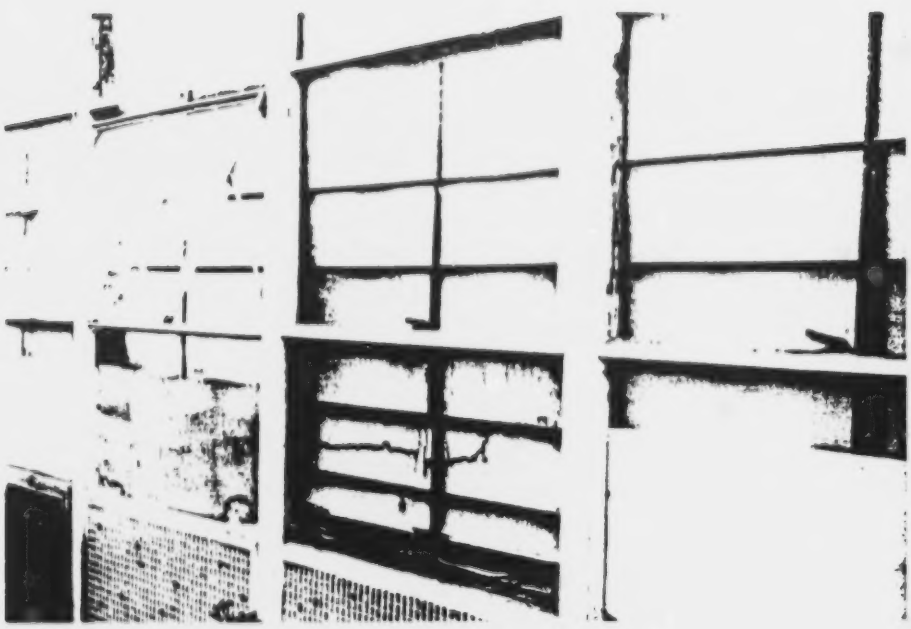
The Riley Building, formerly Klein Elementary, meets a variety of community needs.

Built in 1955, the building was in need of renovation. Exterior windows were cracked and pock-marked.

Out side...

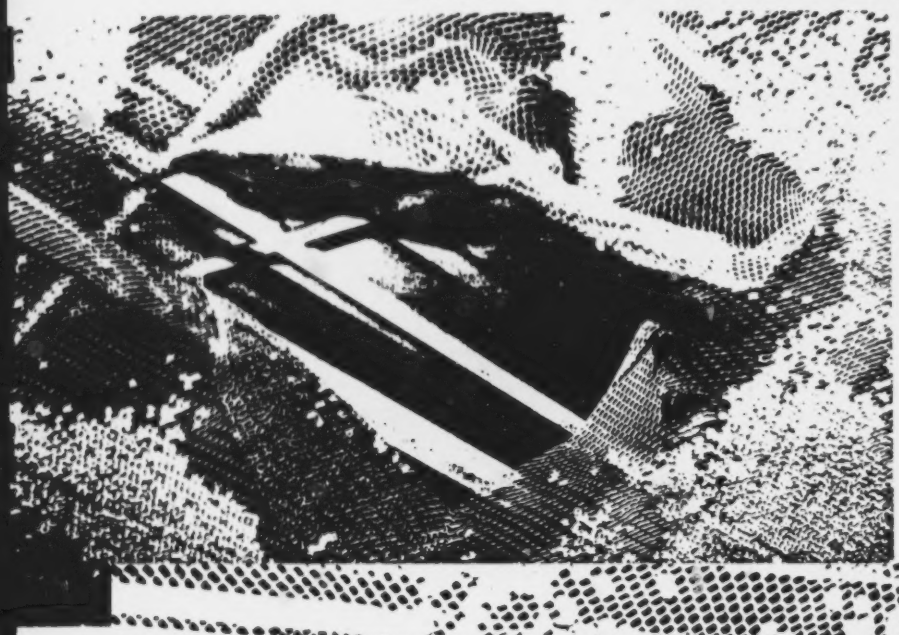


The damage of vandals could be seen.



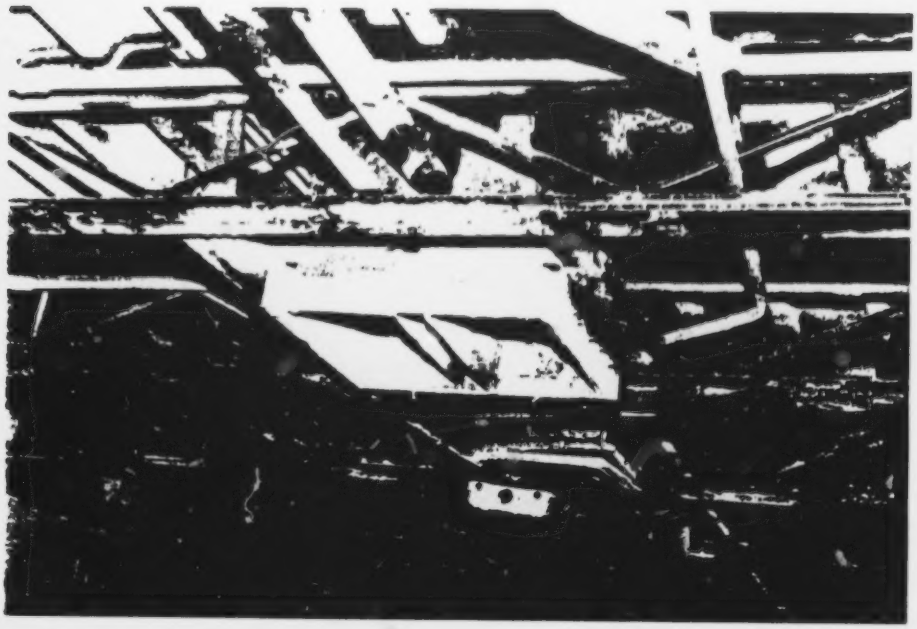
Windows leaked and glazing was cracked.

After Asbestos...

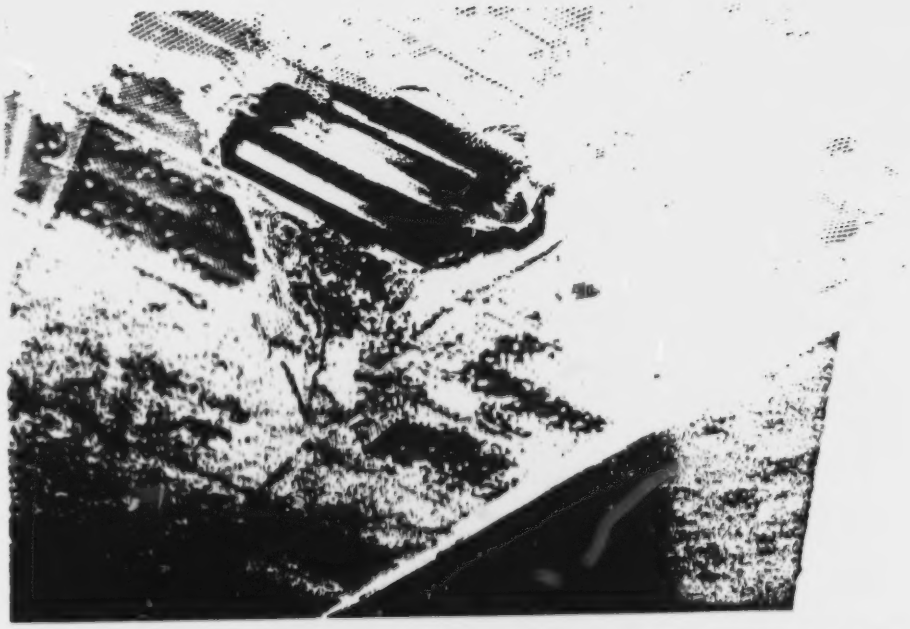


Residue clings to wire mesh after asbestos removal.

After the asbestos was carted away, wiring and electrical fixtures were left exposed.



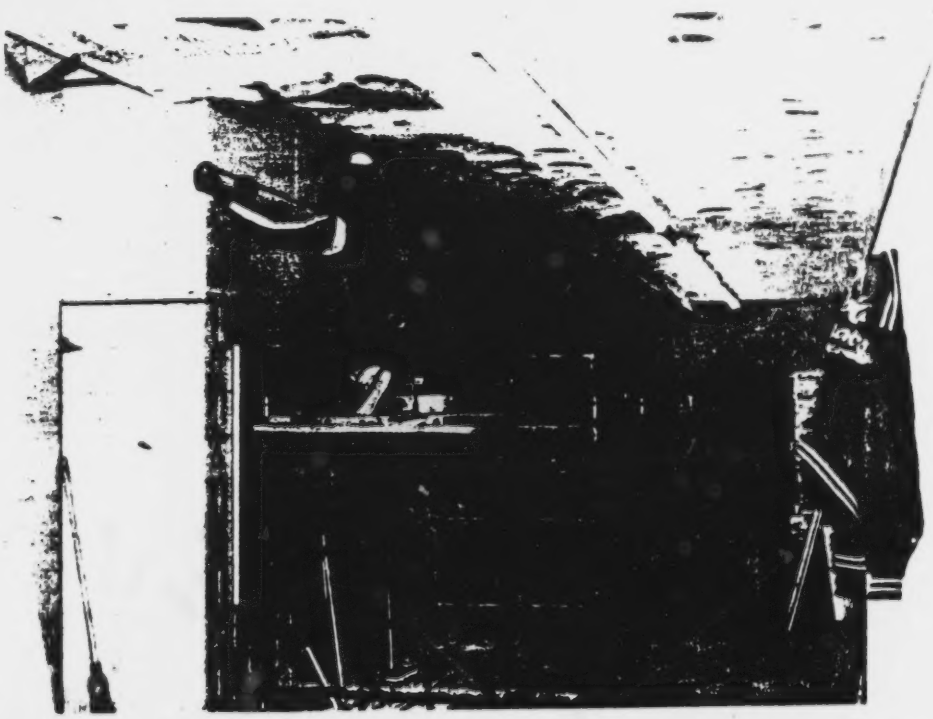
Girders were bared...



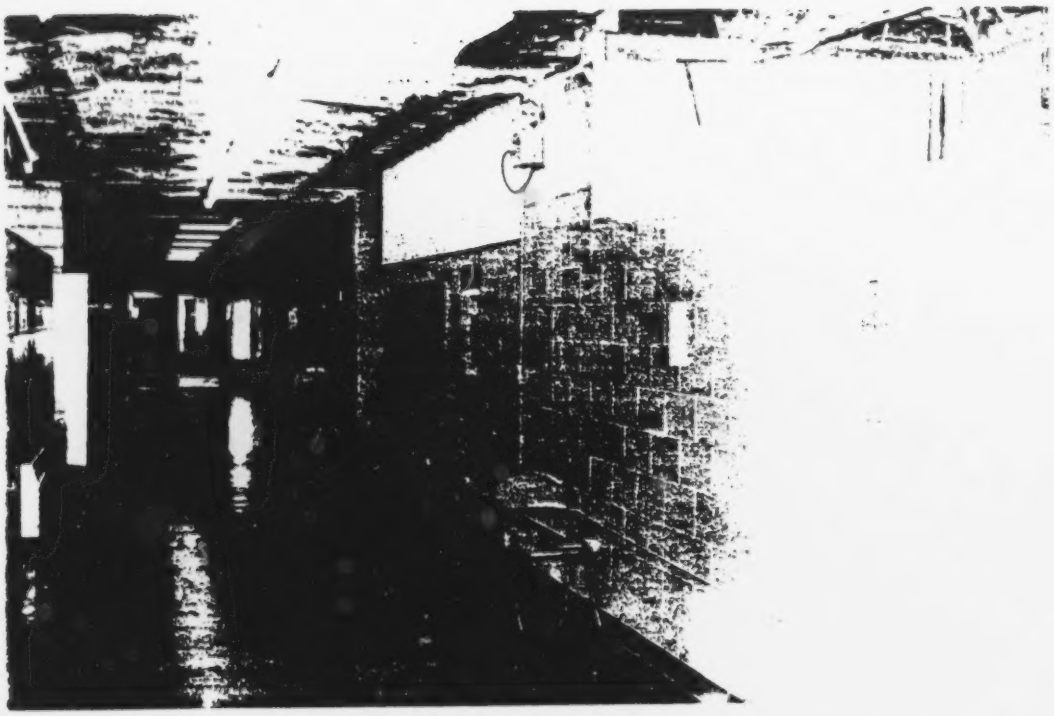
Glass partitions (lower right) divided classrooms from dim hallways. Glass partitions no longer met fire code standards.

Work Begins

Glass partitions, separating rooms from hallways, are removed. Wire mesh is peeled back to allow building-up of inner wall.

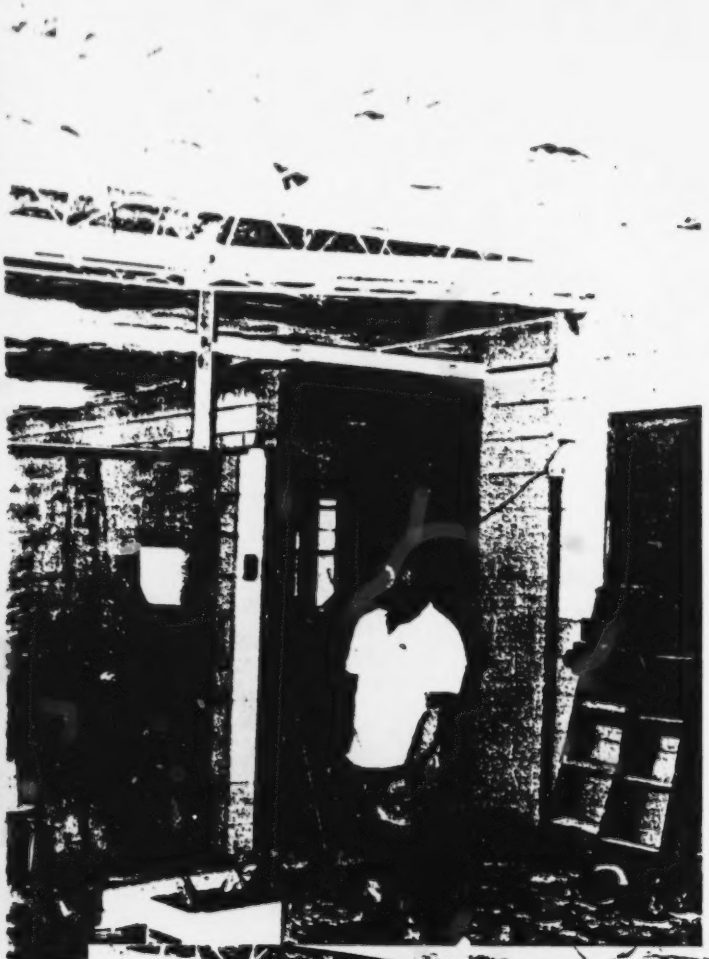


Building up the wall and enclosing classrooms helps prevent sound travel between classrooms and the hallway.
Project ASSET students utilize basic carpentry skills.

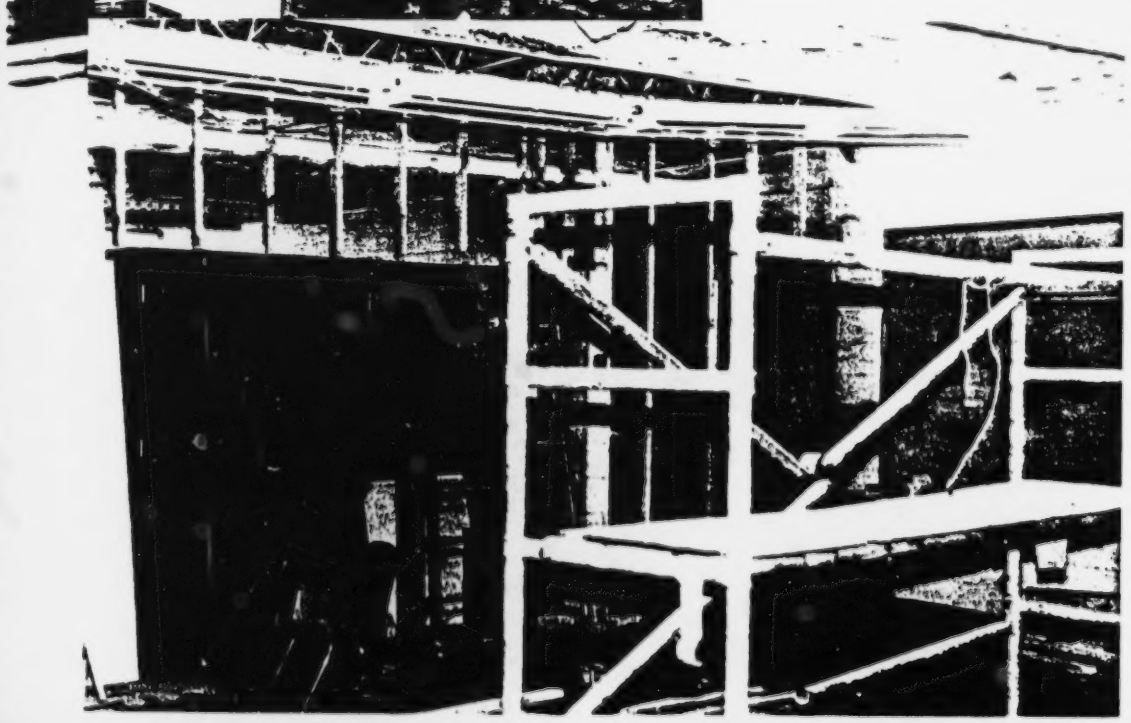


Wire mesh hovered unattractively over classrooms, offices, and hallways throughout the Riley Building.

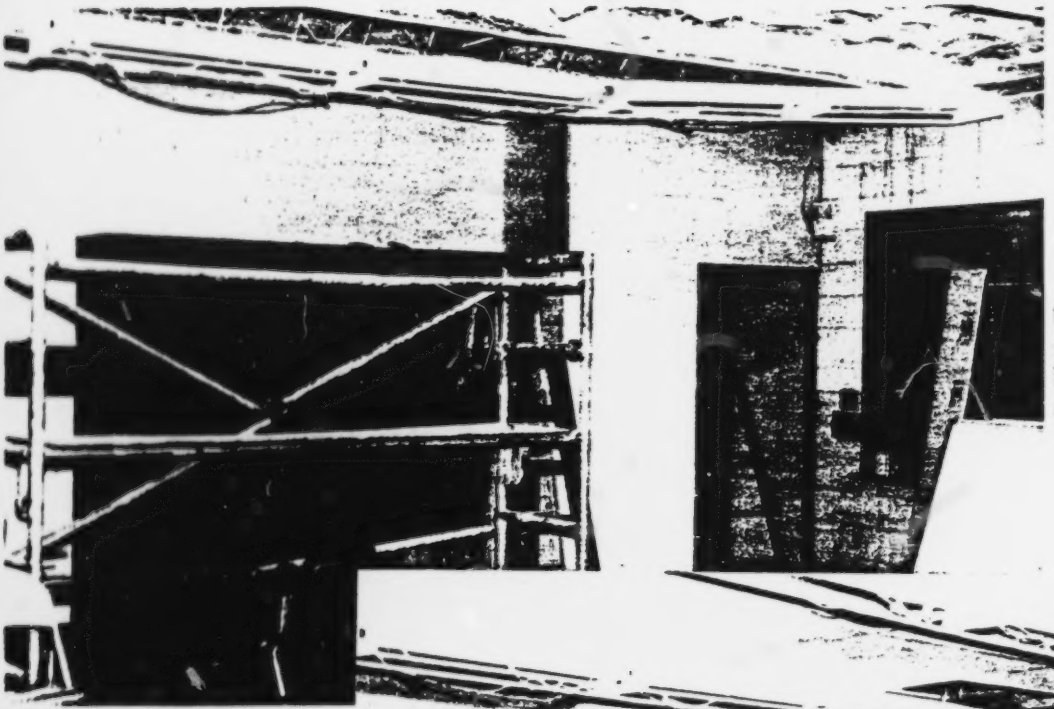
Watching a Room Grow



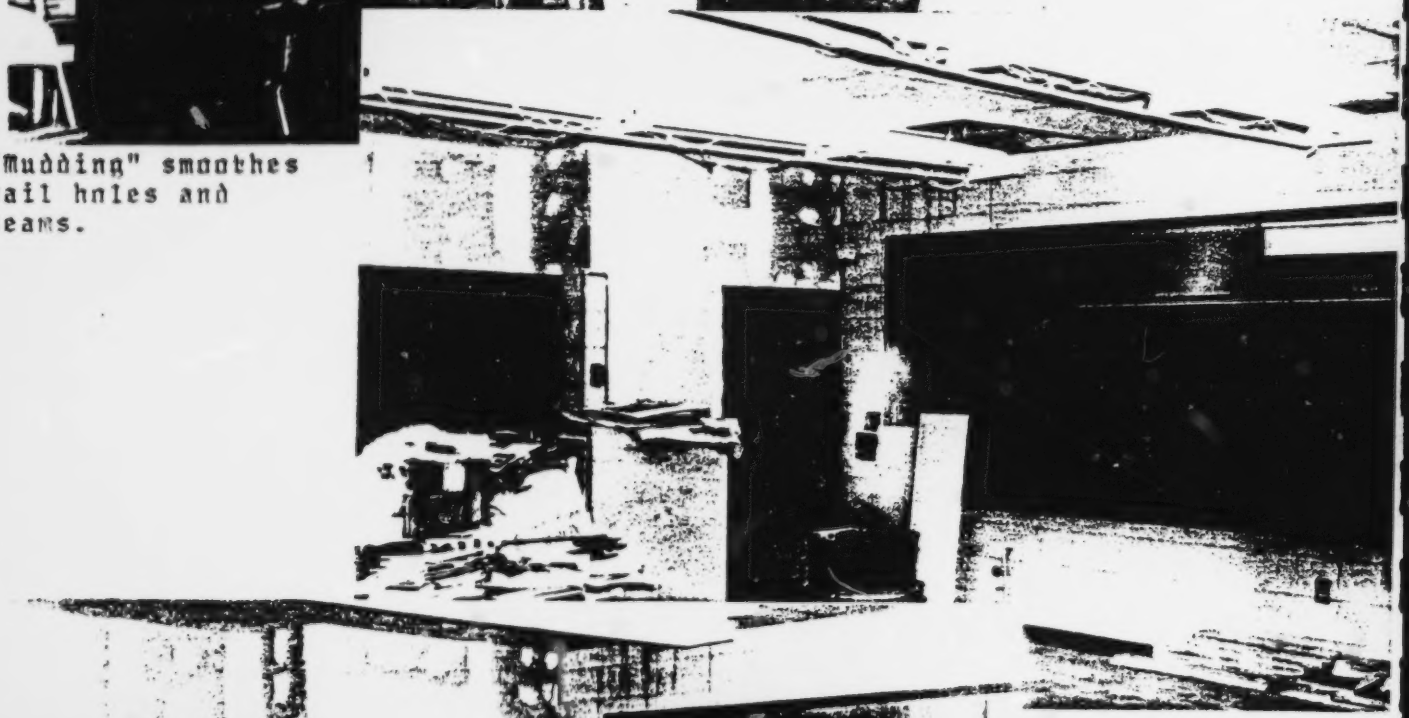
Glass partitions and wooden doors bordered in glass are removed.



Door frames are built. Studs prepare the first stage of the new wall in Room 9.



Wallboard covers studs used to build up the classroom walls.

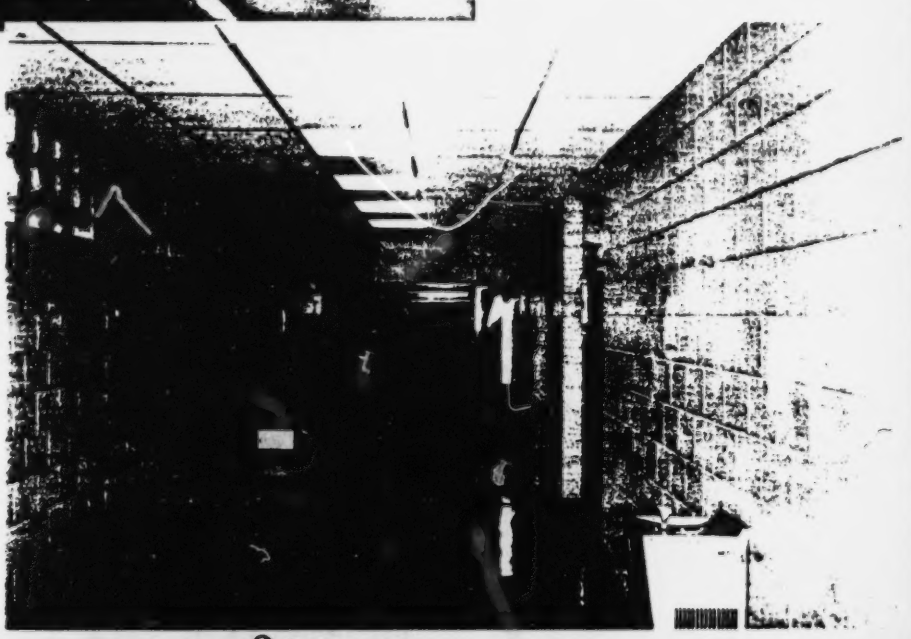


"Mudding" smoothes nail holes and seams.

A new door is hung and walls are ready for painting.

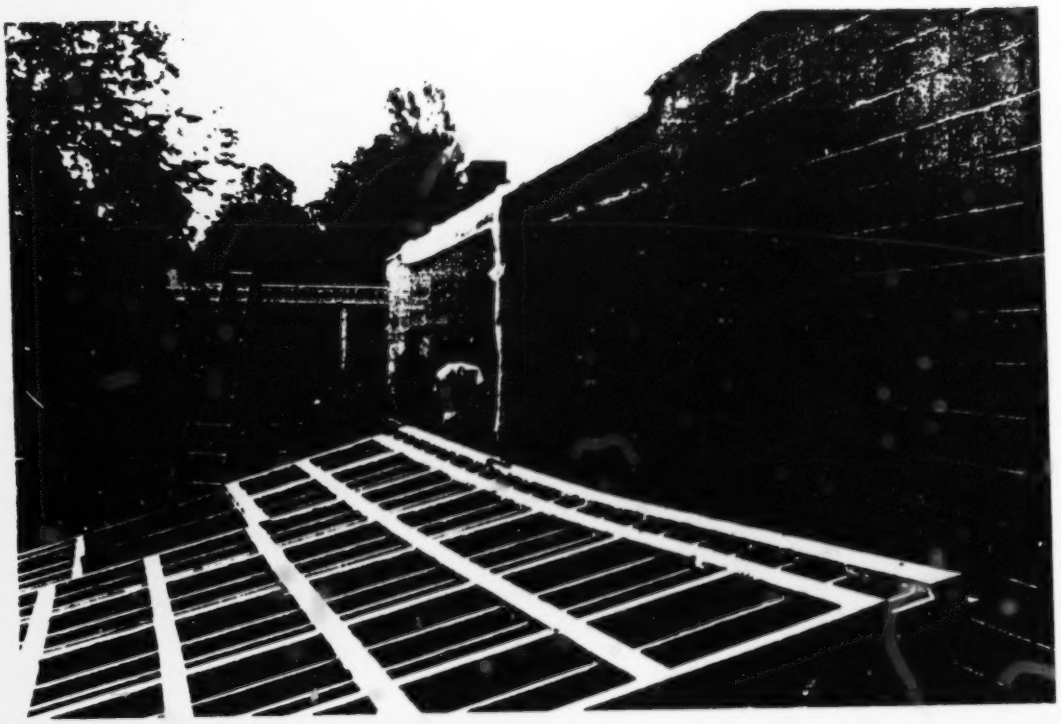
New Ceilings!

A new ceiling "develops" It makes a dramatic difference in the hallway.



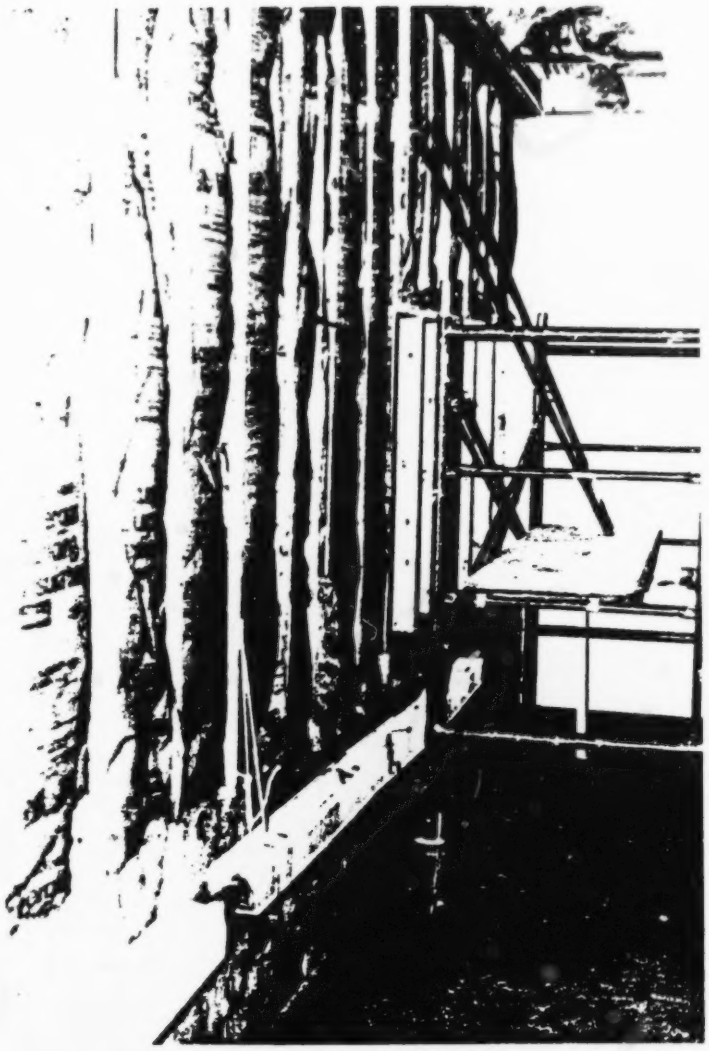
Large and gaping, "open classroom" developed new meaning at Riley this summer.

Project ASSET students worked hard using various hand-tools to remove existing wall structures.

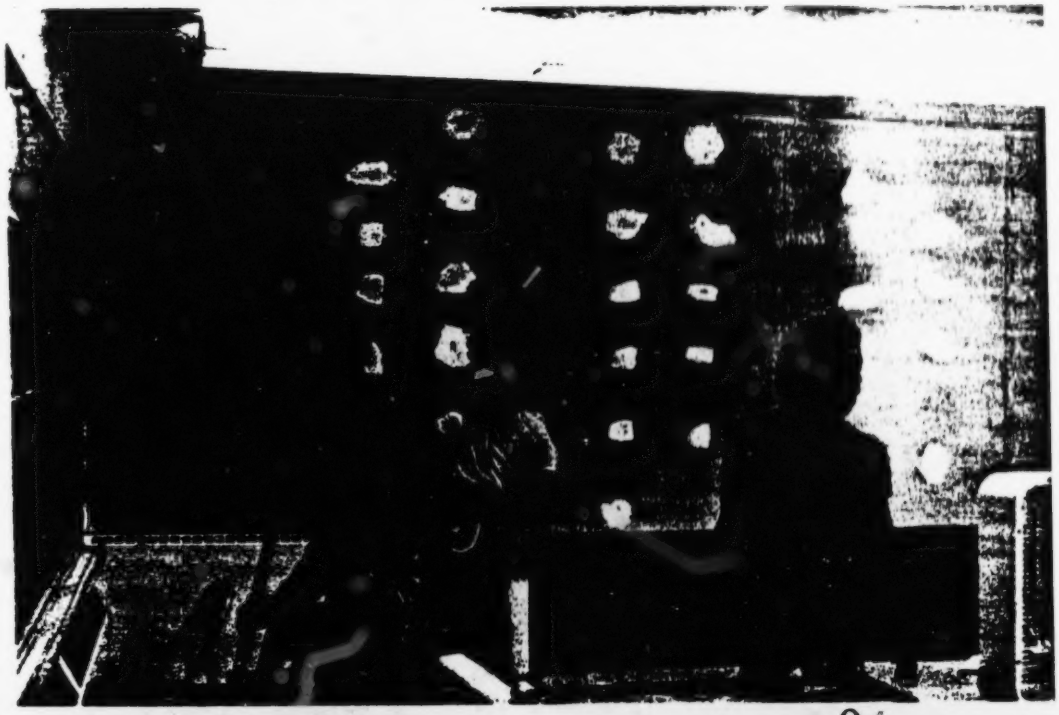


Wall sections were built separately and installed.

Studs form a checker board of the outer walls. Students, Julius Humphries and Shawn Guy prepare to install exterior gypsum board.

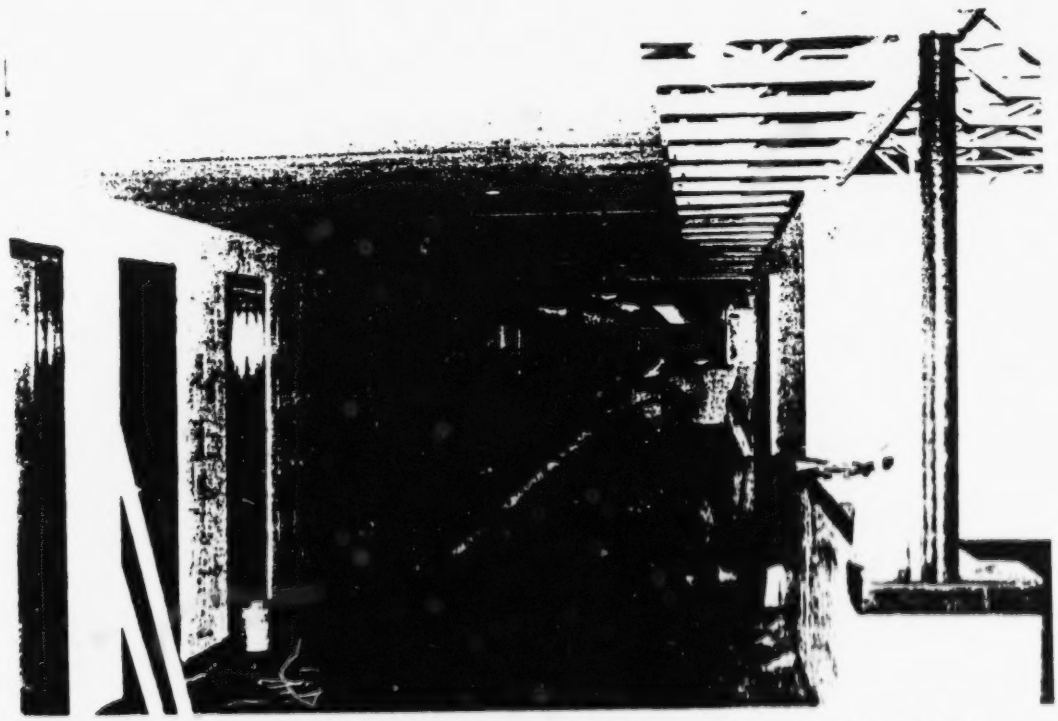


Insulation with a high "R-factor" is stuffed between studs.



Students, LeRoy Robinson (left) and Micha Seltzer clean up Clean-up prepara for finishing touches of "mudding" and paint.

Project ASSET students, Jerry Goodlow and Rashad Shahid, position ceiling supports for the more extensive work required in the entry way.



Supports are needed to support wallboard covering the entry way.

The outer walls are removed and new walls installed one classroom at a time.

The Riley Building in stages of simultaneous renovation.